DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 145 EA 013 854

AUTHOR Bimes, Beverly J.
TITLE [Dealing with Teacher Stress and Burnout.]
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National School Boards Association (41st, Dallas, TX, April 11-14, 1981). For a related document, see EA 013 853.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Coping; Elementary Secondary Education; Self Concept; *Stress Variables; *Teacher Burnout
IDENTIFIERS Time Management

ABSTRACT

There are practical steps that board members can take to prevent the waste of teacher power that results from burnout. These steps involve teacher renewal, effective time management, and creative inservice programs that promote continued professional growth. The first step in teacher renewal is to help teachers increase their self-knowledge and free themselves from their psychological bonds. This can be cost-free. All that is necessary is provision of time for teachers to talk through their frustrations together and to complete a self-assessment worksheet to share with each other. Once teachers have looked at themselves, it is easier for them to look at their time management skills. By answering a series of questions about the way they use time, teachers can see alternatives that help them reduce stress. The vitality that can be regained through increased activities for self-knowledge and time management can be furthered through meaningful inservice workshops. New thinking about inservice programs is essential. The key to keeping teachers in the classroom is in helping them gain control of their lives. (Author/IRT)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
BJ Bimes
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

[Dealing with Teacher Stress and Burnout]

by Beverly Bimes

Three years ago, I wrote an article entitled, "Teaching--A Profession in Exodus." It began:

> As the bell rang signaling the end of another exhausting week, Jill Jackson sat at her cluttered desk and pried her shoes off her swollen aching feet. Staring at her from a bulletin board was a poster which shouted its message, "No one said teaching was going to be an easy job." Feeling exhausted and discouraged, she picked up a daily paper, and fervently turned to the help-wanted section. She began to think about herself in terms of marketable skills for a new vocation.

I was Jill Jackson--a career teacher whose vocation was flickering to an end. Although the term teacher "burnout" had not come into existence yet, I had all of the classic symptoms; I felt bitter, unappreciated, overworked and underpaid. Therefore, I desperately sought an escape from a profession, which had virtually been my entire life for over a decade.

Why had I become so disillusioned with my profession? I know of few other jobs which are so demanding. This business-this life of motivating, encouraging, prodding, challenging, and counseling students, and, at the same time, earning their respect is exhausting. Directing large groups, giving undivided attention, programming content following lesson plans, and checking papers as well as the lavatory are all part of the educator's daily fare. Then there are the agonizing problems of how to challenge Dan, of how to find the time to talk with Larry whose mother has just died, or of how to reach Joan who has just been recently kicked out of her house. The dedicated educator who attempts to help students survive with understanding, with intelligence, and with hope finds that these tasks are suddenly usurping his/her entire life.

ED207145
EA 013 854

Society often responds to this dedication by telling teachers that they are incompetent and unworthy. Thus, the teacher feels much like a pitcher who has given freely and willingly over the years; however, what happens to this pitcher if it is never refilled or replenished? The result is teacher burnout.

Having survived this destructive syndrome personally and having worked with burned out teachers across the nation this year, during my tenure as National Teacher of the Year, I am assured that there are practical steps which you, as concerned board members, can take to prevent this tragic waste of teacher power. These steps involve teacher renewal, more effective time management, and creative in-service for continued professional growth.

The first step toward teacher renewal is to help teachers get in touch with themselves (increase their self-knowledge) and to free them from their psychological bondage. For years teachers have dedicated their lives to helping others find themselves, and yet, quite paradoxically, they have denied themselves this necessity of life. In attempting to live up to the teacher myth that a person must give his or her entire life to be a dedicated teacher (as personified by the old-fashioned teacher image-no marital life, no social life, etc.) teachers find that they are caught in a type of psychological bondage. They experience feelings of guilt if they spend time in leisure activities; they set unrealistic goals which are doomed to failure; and they suffer from a distorted perception of reality which lessens their creativity. Thus the battle for psychological freedom must be fought continuously if teachers are to achieve and to retain freedom from the tyranny of their own thoughts, feelings, purposes, goals, and behaviors and from what society expects of them. According to Karen Horney in an article entitled, Self Analysis--"Self-knowledge renders a person free from inner bondages and thus makes him free for the development of his best potentialities."

Helping the teacher get to know himself is a cost-free item. It simply involves providing the opportunity being a facilitator. Time set aside for teachers to talk through their frustration together and to look at themselves on paper can achieve a great deal. By asking teachers to complete a self-assessment work sheet and to share with each other, in a nonthreatening environment, and by giving them an activity where they focus on their pie-of-life and on how they "slice" their time, teachers have new insights, about themselves and about their profession. These concrete activities are a first step in achieving teachers' renewal. Often a teacher feels isolated and myopic. When they realize their fellow teachers have many of the same problems, they are encouraged to seek solutions together. Through you these activities, which are designed to increase self-knowledge, and through sharing with colleagues, teachers soon realize there are alternatives; there are ways to escape this psychological bondage.

After one of these sharing sessions, one faculty decided to start a running program designed by the track coach to ease even the most resisting middle-aged faculty member into running in a "painless" manner. Seeing fifteen to twenty teachers whose only concept of exercise was walking to the school cafeteria, attempting to run with the boy's track team was a sight to behold; however, the fringe benefits were unbelievable. This group began meeting on weekends to participate in runs. On route to these runs, they found themselves talking about school enthusiastically, for they had rediscovered themselves, each other, and their professional pride. As a result productivity increased and depression decreased.

How do I know? I was one of the runners!

After teachers become reacquainted with themselves, it is easier for them

to look at their management of time since inability to structure time produces stress. Over the years, they become locked into patterns of behavior which are not productive to learning or to them. Again a series of concrete activities can create an awareness of alternatives that can make teachers more cognizant of the importance of time management. In considering choice-response alternatives, the follwing questions can generate an awakening dis - cussion:

1. What "behavior" in my classroom do I repeat on a daily basis? (List them)
2. What are my internal responses, feelings, judgments, and thoughts about these behaviors?
3. How does this response serve me? My students? What does it help me get, help me avoid, protect me from?
4. What price do I pay for responding this way?
5. What are <u>all</u> of the different responses I might "try on?"

Many times teachers become so blocked by routine patterns that their work becomes mundane, and they lose sight of educational goals. One way to encourage teachers to broaden their perspectives, by seeing new alternatives, is through a peer visitation program. By visiting colleagues classes, teachers have a great deal to gain.

It is true that teacher vitality can be regained through time and through activities being set aside for self-knowledge and for time management; however, these activities alone will not prevent teacher burnout. In order for the excitement of teaching to remain aglow, continuous opportunities for professional growth must exist in the form of meaningful in-service workshops.

Thinking in new and creative ways about in-service is essential. Providing released time for professional growth instead of at the end of an

already tiring day, including parents in workshops so that they will provide strong support systems, and setting up pedagogical service stations in schools where teachers can stop and get their tanks filled and their batteries re-chared on a daily basis are all innovative ways of encouraging professional growth.

In the words of Terry Barton, "It is not an ordinary person who can reach out and touch humanity on a daily basis. A teacher is bursting with talent, enthusiasm, and understanding." Our children deserve these kinds of teachers. With encouragement and with attention, we can keep these teachers in the classroom where they belong. The key is helping these teachers to get in control of their lives.